

MLA Writing

Thesis Statement—A sentence (or sentences) that formulates your topic and your point-of-view. It is the answer to the central question or problem you have raised.

Ex. Throughout Joyce McDonald's Swallowing Stones many characters depict Amy Ruggerio as a sexually promiscuous individual. Although Amy may have contributed to this notion by having a brief fling in the beginning of the novel, readers soon realize that she is undeserving of this reputation and the alienation that she receives from her peers.

Ex. In Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird one can argue that the character of Atticus Finch is not only central to the piece, but the moral backbone of the story as well.

Underline Titles—Books, plays, long poems, pamphlets, and periodicals must all be underlines. Any time the title of the book appears in your paper, underline it.

Ex. To Kill a Mockingbird

Ex. Swallowing Stones

Quotations—Quote only words, phrases, lines, and passages that are particularly interesting and support your ideas. Over quotation can bore your readers and might lead them to conclude that you are neither an original thinker nor a skillful writer.

1. Using Quotes in your paper: Use parenthetical references in ALL the quotes you use in your upcoming paper.

Ex. After Scout unwittingly adverts a riot, she describes the walk home stating, “Atticus and Jem were well ahead of us, and I assumed, that Atticus was giving Jem hell for not going home, but I was wrong” (157).

Ex. In the beginning of Swallowing Stones the narrator states, “There is no stopping it; the bullet rips through the hot summer haze, missing trees, houses, unsuspecting birds, coming to roost, finally, like an old homing pigeon” (3).

***The page number is set *inside* the parenthesis *after* the quote marks and *before* the period.

2. Block Quoting: If a quotation runs *more than four lines*, you need to block quote it.

Ex. After Scout unwittingly adverts a riot, she describes the walk home stating:

Tab over
twice

Finally Atticus returned, switched off the light, above the jail door, and picked up his chair. Walking toward the office, Dill and I fell into step behind Atticus and Jem. Dill was encumbered by the chair, and his pace was slower. Atticus and Jem were well ahead of us, and I assumed, that Atticus was giving Jem hell for not going home, but I was wrong. As they passed under the streetlight, Atticus reached out and massaged Jem's hair, his one gesture of affection. (157)

*****Do not** use quotations for a block quote. The page number also comes in parenthesis *after* the period.

3. Ellipsis: Whenever you wish to omit a word, a phrase, or a sentence from a quoted passage, you should be guided by two principles: fairness to the author quoted and the grammatical integrity of your writing. A quotation should never be presented in a way that could cause a reader to misunderstand the sentence structure of the original source.

Ex. As she walks home, Scout muses, "Dill and I fell into step behind Atticus and Jem...Atticus and Jem were well ahead of us, and I assumed, that Atticus was giving Jem hell for not going home, but I was wrong" (157).

Ex. In the beginning of the novel the narrator states, "There is no stopping it; the bullet rips through the hot summer haze..." (3).

MLA FORMAT CHANGES (Seventh Edition) :

Use double quotation marks around quotations incorporated into the text, single quotation marks around quotations within those quotations.

Ex:

Emily recounts meeting Anna for the first time: “ ‘Are you new here?’ I asked a fellow classmate. ‘No,’ she answered, ‘I am a student, too’ ” (45).

***IMPORTANT CHANGE:

When a quotation in your paper consists *entirely* of material enclosed by quotation marks (quoting a quote), usually one pair of double quotation marks is sufficient, provided that the introductory wording makes it clear who is speaking the quoted material.

Ex:

Meeting a fellow classmate, Emily asks, “Are you new here?” (45).

- Always double space
- Font size 12

MLA Literature Paper (Larson)

Larson 1

page #
(your last
name followed
by the #)

Dan Larson

Professor Duncan

English 102

16 April 2001

The Transformation of Mrs. Peters:

An Analysis of "A Jury of Her Peers"

In Susan Glaspell's 1917 short story "A Jury of Her Peers," two women accompany their husbands and a county attorney to an isolated house where a farmer named John Wright has been choked to death in his bed with a rope. The chief suspect, Wright's wife Minnie, is in jail awaiting trial. The sheriff's wife, Mrs. Peters, has come along to gather some personal items for Minnie, and Mrs. Hale has joined her. Early in the story, Mrs. Hale sympathizes with Minnie and objects to the way the male investigators are "snoopin' round and criticizin'" her kitchen (293). In contrast, Mrs. Peters shows respect for the law, saying that the men are doing "no more than their duty" (293). By the end of the story, however, Mrs. Peters has joined Mrs. Hale in a conspiracy of silence, lied to the men, and committed a crime--hiding key evidence. What causes this dramatic change?

One critic, Leonard Mustazza, argues that Mrs. Hale recruits Mrs. Peters "as a fellow 'juror' in the case, moving the sheriff's wife away from her sympathy for her husband's position and towards identification with the accused woman" (494). While this is true, Mrs. Peters also reaches insights on her own. Her observations in

The opening lines name the story and establish context.

Present tense is used to describe details from the story.

Quotations from the story are cited with page numbers in parentheses.

The opening paragraph ends with Larson's research question.

Quotation from a secondary source: author is named in a signal phrase; page number is given in parentheses.

The thesis asserts Larson's main point.

the kitchen lead her to understand Minnie's grim and lonely plight as the wife of an abusive farmer, and her identification with both Minnie and Mrs. Hale is strengthened as the men conducting the investigation trivialize the lives of women.

The first evidence that Mrs. Peters reaches understanding on her own surfaces in the following passage:

The sheriff's wife had looked from the stove to the sink-- to the pail of water which had been carried in from outside. [...] That look of seeing into things, of seeing through a thing to something else, was in the eyes of the sheriff's wife now. (295)

Something about the stove, the sink, and the pail of water connects with her own experience, giving Mrs. Peters a glimpse into the life of Minnie Wright. The details resonate with meaning.

Social historian Elaine Hedges argues that such details, which evoke the drudgery of a farm woman's work, would not have been lost upon Glaspell's readers in 1917. Hedges tells us what the pail and the stove, along with another detail from the story--a dirty towel on a roller--would have meant to women of the time. Laundry was a dreaded all-day affair. Water had to be pumped, hauled, and boiled; then the wash was rubbed, rinsed, wrung through a wringer, carried outside, and hung on a line to dry. "What the women see, beyond the pail and the stove," writes Hedges, "are the hours of work it took Minnie to produce that one clean towel" (56).

A long quotation is set off by indenting; no quotation marks are needed; ellipsis dots in brackets indicate words omitted from the source.

Larson summarizes ideas from a secondary source and then quotes from that source; he names the author in a signal phrase and gives a page number in parentheses.